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ABSTRACT

When the paraprofessional in bilingual education is used effectively, individual needs and individual differences of the students are met. An approach to the training of the paraprofessional has been developed at the Merrimack Education Center (MEC). The training program involves active participation of all paraprofessionals. Understanding and synthesizing child growth and development principles as well as knowing the specific duties of the paraprofessional are necessary components of the training program. Over the past five years, MEC, acting in the role of an educational brokerage center, has continuously interacted between professionals and paraprofessionals in order to reassess the needs of communities continuously for the formulation of new immediate and long term behavioral objectives. Based on these objectives a variety of programs has been prepared for workshops of varying sizes and lengths of time, and semester courses to meet the variety of needs. The bulk of this document describes one program designed to meet the specific needs of instructional aides in an urban area. Program instruction is couched within a framework of understanding the process of human behavior and how children learn within a social-psychological environment. Reinforced consistently in the role of instructional aide is the need for the pupils to identify with elements and people within the community. Instructional aides can be adequately trained in ten weeks. (Author)

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THE ROLE OF THE PARAPROFESSIONAL IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

(Presented to the
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ABSTRACT

When the paraprofessional in bilingual education is used effectively, individual needs and individual differences of the student are met. An approach to the training of the paraprofessional has been developed at the Merrimack Education Center. The training program involves active participation of all paraprofessionals. Understanding and synthesizing Child Growth and Development principles as well as knowing the specific duties of the paraprofessional are necessary components of the training program.

Urbanicity contains a number of complex issues for education today. One of these issues is the large number of students who drop out of our schools not in the formal classroom lecture environment that has been characteristic of American education. However they have been shown to be able to respond to individualized instruction, many are problem learners, the technical nature of whose difficulties is only now becoming clear, many of the latter class are clearly of normal intelligence.

Financially, it is not feasible to employ a sufficient number of teachers to insure the facilitation of individual tutorial instruction all the time for all the students. However, an alternative is rapidly becoming apparent. Problem learners will respond positively to attention from adults in the community. Research and experience has provided substantial evidence that these adults can be prepared to be effective teacher's aides. It has been demonstrated that they can also plug up the gap that exists between the harried professional teacher and the educationally handicapped youngster. The results accomplished by this differentiated staffing pattern are almost always encouraging; sometimes very good; and frequently heart-warming, for it lies within the power of many a teacher's aide to turn an incipient human tragedy into one of life's minor miracles.

Today, there is a keen awareness of individual differences and individual learning needs, both with problem learners and the student population in general. Improved diagnostic instruments and procedures in conjunction with the aforementioned underscore the identified educational need for assistance within the classroom. In fact there is increased pressure to ameliorate the situation.

The acceptance in employing paraprofessional teacher aides permits teaching to meet the individual differences that exist between students. Professional staff will have improved use of their time. Differentiated staffing with paraprofessionals may spur improvement in the quality and availability of educational services as well as positive changes in the traditional role of the classroom teacher.

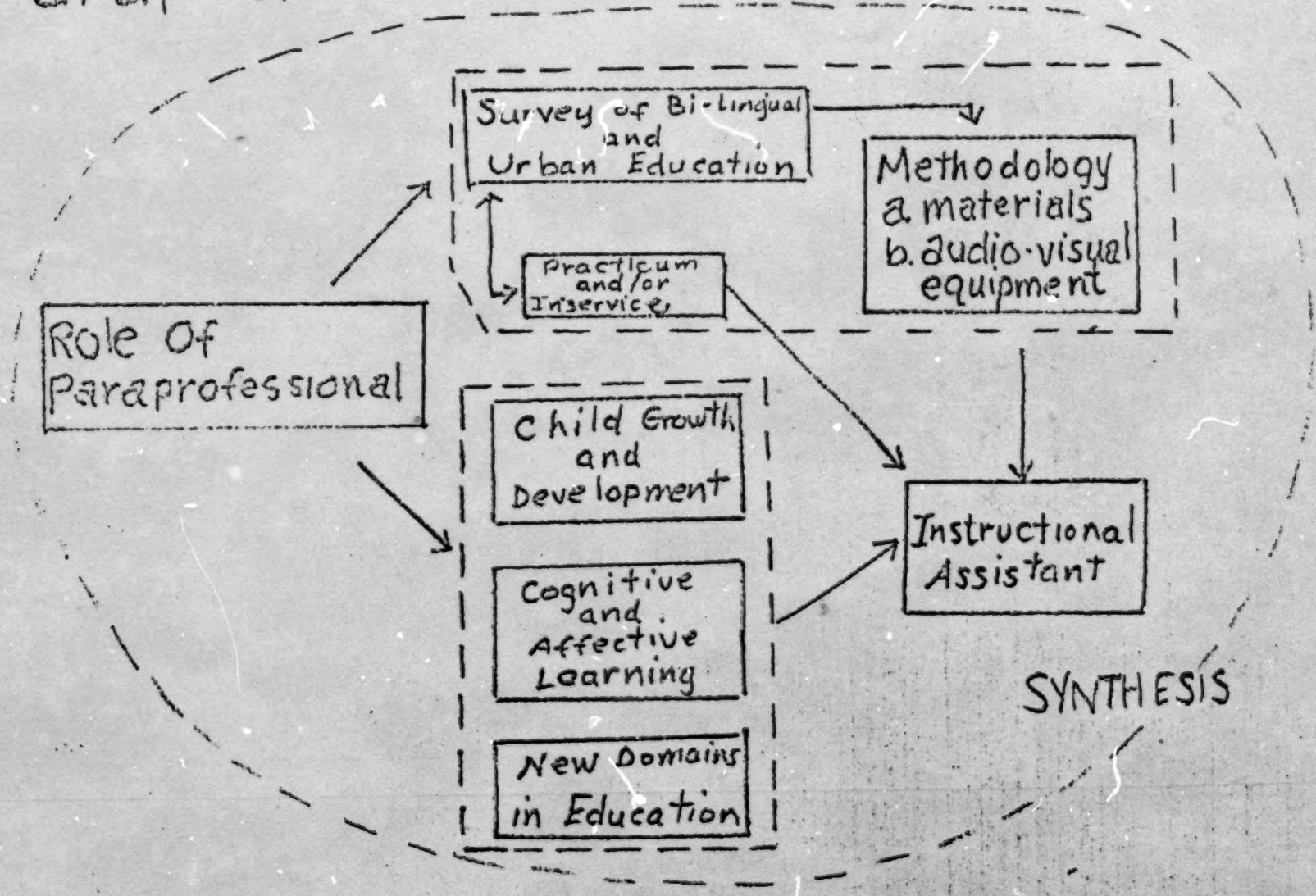
There are two categories of, paraprofessionals within the school organization - the instructional aide and the clerical aide. Briefly, their job description are the following:

> Instructional Aide - A paraprofessional who, working under the direction and supervision of the teacher, performs various routine duties including administering and scoring tests, helping students find and work with instructional materials, supervising in large classrooms and learning centers, etc. Specific duties will depend on the preparation and experience and skills of the individual paraprofessional.
>
> Clerical Aide - A paraprofessional whose duties are to relieve teachers from routine, monitorial and clerical duties, to assist in the preparation of instructional materials; and to assist in organizing and maintaining the instructional setting.

This paper is concerned with the instructional aide.

The Merrimack Education Center (MEC) located in north central Massachusetts has ongoing programs for staff development including college credit and non-credit courses for educational professionals and paraprofessionals. Over these past five years, a specific theoretical framework has evolved. MEC, acting in the role of an educational brokerage center, has continuously interacted between professionals and paraprofessionals in order to continuously reassess the needs of the communities for the formulation of new immediate and long term behavioral objectives. Based on these objectives, a variety of programs have been prepared for workshops of varying sizes and lengths of time and semester courses to meet the variety of needs. Affiliations

Schema of Paraprofessional Training Program



with area colleges meet the academic needs of those who wish to matriculate. Others may receive certificates upon completion of preparation programs. Still others may participate in courses or programs for in-service credit. Thus, different levels of courses or programs are studying various specific areas at depth levels appropriate for stated and assessed needs of the participants in such areas as educational psychology, children with special needs, bilingualism, urbanicity, etc.

The following is one program, within the context of the above, designed to meet the specific needs of instructional aides in an urban area.

The schema of the training program (Figure 1) demonstrates the process employed for synthesizing the philosophical materials and practica experiences involved in the development of an effective instructional assistant in the urban school. Program instruction is couched within a framework of understanding the process of human behavior and how children learn within a social-psychological environment. It is felt that examination of the general concepts in human behavior will enable the instructional aide to analyze behaviors in the city and the manner in which one interacts within the city. Reinforced consistently in the role of the instructional aide is the need for the pupils to identify with elements and people within the community. The instructional aide is in the unique position of observing, reporting, and implementing procedures for both perspectives of understanding the needs of the community and the needs of the classroom. In addition, pupils can identify with the instructional aide because of similar cultural and societal qualities. Since one of the instructional aides is conferring with teachers regarding the needs of the individual child, the teacher will gain greater insight and understanding of the social-psychological-educational needs of the child.

The role of the instructional aide needs to be specified to create the most effective disposition of his/her skills in the classroom. Therefore the following competencies should be developed for the para professional to function effectively in the role of the instructional aide (See Figure 2 below)

Figure 2:

Competencies of the Instructional Assistant in Urban Education

The Instructional Assistant will be able to:

1. Confer with the teacher to identify pupil neds and learning style.
2. Plan and conduct individual sessions with the pupil
3. Plan and conduct group sessions with a maximum of 5 to 6 pupils.
4. Observe the needs of the pupil during individual and group sessions.
5. Confer with the teacher regarding pupil skill, mastery, and progress.
6. Develop cultural based instruction to enhance self-concept.

Instructional aides can be adequately trained in 10 weeks. At the end of this time they will be prepared to provide meaningful and productive help to regular classroom teachers in assisting pupils in bilingual and urban education.

The arrangements are perhaps a matter of personal decision as to detail, but a program of 50 hours of formal instruction plus 50 to 60 hours of classroom experience working with children under the supervision of the teacher is suggested. The instruction may be given in 2 hour sessions; the MEC pilot project used 25 such sessions in 2 five-week periods, the first period with 3 afternoon sessions a week, the second period with 2 such sessions, classroom practicum experience can run concurrently, and should be used for applying the principles and instructional materials that arise from the formal segment periods. The MEC project involved in excess of 200 children identified as having learning problems in an urban setting, who were assisted individually or were seen in groups of no more than 6.

The classes for the instructional aides may include lectures, discussion seminar groups, workshops, and participative meetings. The content suggested for the formal instruction is given in the Training Program Content (See Figure 3) A substantial background in bilingualism and urban education is in order. Psychology, child growth and development, motivation, observation and participation related to visual-motor perceptual development, auditory perception and language development, social and emotional adjustment, bilingualism, cultural and ethnic pluralism, all are in order. The instructional aides will be working with underachieving children and youths who have experienced the frustrations attendant on failure at learning; considerable emphasis can, therefore, be placed on helping them understand how and why pupils fail, and why pupils fail, and what can be done about it.

Figure 3:

Instructional Assistant - Training Program Content

1. Analysis of individual profiles.
2. Behavioral characteristics
3. Learning styles-scale referrent of learning activities.
4. Assessment devices and observation techniques.
5. Sequencing skills development.
6. Programming to meet individual needs and small group needs.
7. Familiarlity with the needs of Bilingual and Urban Education.

In addition, the trainees should be given sufficient orientation to enable them to perform effectively in their new environment. The role of the instructional aide is not well-defined and considerable self-image development is in order. Lectures on the role of the instructional aide in the learning team should be given, as well as a lecture on the expectations and limitations of instructional aides.

The trainees should also be sufficiently grounded in educational ethics, and should be equipped with guidelines with respect to the so-called "survival" skills; that is, the procedures and customs that grease the administrative machinery of the school system.

The trainees can profitably be given special instruction in the methods of recording pupil behaviors. This prepares them for the field work practicum; an adequate grounding in this technique will be sufficient to enable them to identify and define problem behaviors.

The trainees should be required to employ formal lesson plans in their practicum work. These plans will have an added value as a source of information for the school administration. The trainees should also learn to develop their own instructional materials that are responsive to the particular needs of the children with whom they are dealing. The MEC experience was that this effort addresses directly the need of the pupils for individualized instruction. Workshop sessions in which the trainees present their own instructional materials tailored for this or that pupil will tend to be richly interactive between the trainees and the instructors. This method will also foster the dedication to the project that was an important part of the MEC experience.

Today the preparation and employment of paraprofessionals in general, and instructional aides in particular, is a relatively new experience for public school systems. Administrators, supervisors, specialists and teachers have previously encountered parents,and volunteers in clerical and non-instructional roles. Their direct educational contact with children was usually at a minimum. However, positive results were being fed back to personnel involved in this project even before the completion of the program.

In evaluating a qualitative project such as this, several factors must be taken into consideration. We have to focus on the needs of the various consumers and how successfully these needs are being met. Not necessarily in order of priority, the consumers are the instructional aides, the children, the teachers, and the administrators, supervisors, and specialists.

The determination of successfully meeting the needs of the instructional aides was made by requesting employed aides who completed our preparation program to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part I dealt with the five basic behavioral objectives of their training program. These were:

1. Conferring with the teacher regarding pupil's learning needs.

2. Planning and conducting individual sessions with pupils to enhance classroom learnings.

3. Planning and conducting group sessions to be based upon the information about pupils provided by the teachers, test profiles, and observed by yourself.

4. Observing and recording pupils' needs during individual and group sessions.

5. Conferring with teachers regarding pupil skill mastery and progress.

In evaluating their ability in these five areas, 94% of the instructional aides reported they were able to perform extremely well as evidenced by checking #5 or #6 on a one to six point scale, on the questionnaire six percent checked #4. None of the respondents reported unsatisfactory performance levels.

The second part of the questionnaire delved into specific skills felt to be required of an instructional aide. There were twelve items inquiring about such skills as these:

#6 - Planning instructional activities based upon the diagnosis reported on an individual pupil's protocol.

#7 - Planning group session according to skills the teacher has delineated.

#8 - Interpreting the teacher's prescriptive strategies.

In evaluating their competence in these skills, 84.1% of the instructional aides considered themselves very competent as evidenced by rating themselves #5 or #6. Fifteen percent checked #4. None of the instructional aides felt the need for a considerable extension of their training program.

Part III, the final section of the questionnaire, investigated the areas of the instructionalaides functioning within the school which were or were not helped by the preparation program. The fourteen items in this section looked at such areas as:

a. modifying instructional materials for the particular child you are working with;

b. creating new materials for instructional purposes;

c. assisting the pupil in integrating what you are working on with the classroom instruction of the teacher.

Eighty-three percent of the responding instructional aides considered the preparation program extremely helpful as evidenced by their checking #5 and #6 on the rating scale. An additional 15.4% checked #4 and 1.5% checked #3. None of the responses indicated that the training program was inconsequential in helping them perform their role as instructional aides.

Overall the responses to the instructional aides' questionnaire indicated a significant value of the preparation program provided for them in fulfilling their constructive role in the public schools. More than 84% of the responses were extremely positive. They felt satisfied that they were or could function competentiy in their role.

At this point in time, we raised questions regarding the validity of the rasponses of the program participants. We took the extreme position that the people responding to questionnaire about a preparation program internalize it as being investigative of them personally. If this observation were accurate then it logically follows that few if any individuals would check the bottom or low end of the rating scale. To do this would be a threatening and dangerous situation resulting in their jeopardizing their positions vocationally, socially, and personally.

Consequently, a second questionnaire (see appendix B) was obtained for the purposes of verification. The second questionnaire was sent to the supervisors of the instructional aides. In addition, the second questionnaire provided the opportunity to obtain from a second vantage point the instructional aid's effectiveness with children.

We used Mazyck's[1], "Rating Scale for Paraprofessionals." The supervisors' ratings of the instructional aides on this scale confirmed the self-ratings made by the aides. From the responses of the supervisors, it was ascertained that 93.8% rated the trainees extremely favorably as evidenced by their checking #5 and

#6 on this six point rating scale. An additional 5.5% of the responses were #4 and 0.6% were [1]Mazyck, Harold - Child Care Paraprofessionals: Characteristics for Selection. ED 053 800

#3. Consequently, the results were interpreted as the supervisors being very satisified with the performance and overall functioning of the instructional aides in their charge.

A third aspect of our evaluation was to inquire of public school administrators their evaluation of the instructional aides. (See Appendix C)

Ninety-two percent of those responding were positively impressed with the manner in which the aides functioned in their respective buildings. Eighty percent were desirous of employing more instructional aides. Twenty percent were intending to retain the same number of aides. Over half of the administrators commented that performance of the aides in their school exceeded their initial expectations. Seventy-six percent reported enthusiastic and positive changes in the staff morale of those teachers who had aides and a significant increase in the rate of productivity in the school programs. Overall, the public school administrators were very much satisfied with the performance of the instructional assistants. In addition, they noted significant increments in the rate of progress and productivity.

The preparation program has been conducted since 1971 ------ groups, men and women, have been trained for employment as instructional aides. At various times the instructional aide preparation program has been designed to meet the needs of a particular segment of the school population on the general school population. All sessions used the same basic model as described earlier. Some interesting unplanned results and benefits of the preparation program accrued. Although the instructional aides were specifically prepared in a particular area, they have succeeded in building skills applicable to other populations of children. Instructional aides prepared for one kind of special needs

and with normal children. From verbal reports of administrators and teachers, it appears that the preparation program conducted has broader applicability than first expected.